

RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN LIFESTYLE: EFFECTS ON INFANT MORTALITY

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Compared to Japan, Spain, Canada, and other post-industrialized countries, the United States has the highest infant mortality rate (IMR) reaching almost 7 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. The rate for African-Americans is 13.63 while the rate for Caucasians is 5.76 and the gap continues to widen. The gap is even wider in Indiana, reaching 18.1 for African-Americans and 6.4 for Caucasians. A few determinants of infant mortality include maternal health, disorders related to short gestation, socioeconomic status, respiratory distress in newborns and inadequate prenatal care. High levels of stress also may pose some special risks for pregnant women. For example, stress may contribute to preterm labor by triggering the release of a hormone called corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH). CRH, which is produced by the brain and the placenta, is closely tied to labor. This may cause premature birth and low birthweight, possibly resulting in death. Further research will be done to investigate if stress management differs among African-American women and Caucasian women and what affect the taboo of therapy among the African-American community has on managing stress related to pregnant women. Research will also be conducted on the "Superwoman Syndrome". The purpose of this research is to provide information on how to decrease the infant mortality rate of African-Americans in particular, and the United States IMR in general.